IMPROVING GRADUATE STUDENT ONBOARDING

Travis Weatherford

Business Manager, MCEC Dept of Civil & Environmental Engineering

March 25, 2025

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PURPOSE

To improve the new graduate student onboarding experience:
- *Enhance communication*
- *Expedite enrollment, GA hires, tuition supplement processing*
- *Smooth transition to campus and academic life*

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PEOPLE INVOLVED

- Faculty advisor (PI)
- CEE Student Services Coordinator
- CEE Administrative Assistant
- CEE Business Manager (myself)
- Other CEE support staff (e.g. IT director, lab manager)
- Critical campus units (ISSS, Graduate School, Bursar's, etc.)
- Current graduate students
- Colleagues with similar roles in other units

PROJECT PATH

Discovery/Process Mapping

- Identified critical onboarding steps and proper sequence through:
    - Discussions with CEE colleagues
    - Interviews with students and colleagues with similar roles in other offices
- Examined communication protocols and prior lapses
- Identifying inputs, key personnel and policies, and student contact touchpoints

Modifications/Refinements

- Instituted frequent communications with incoming students and scheduled orientation meetings
- Mindful sharing of critical information with colleagues
- Prepared and distributed an onboarding to-do list, which was referenced during orientation meetings and follow up
- Scheduled regular follow-up appointments with new students to check on milestone completion
- Calendared follow-up announcements and check-ins (e.g., mid-term check on enrollment holds)

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KEY IMPROVEMENTS

- Enhanced pre-arrival communication with and between student, faculty advisor and departmental staff
- Step-by-step onboarding checklist and guidance
- Scheduled follow ups with students at defined intervals
- Repetition of material
- Key milestones monitored for follow-up
- Integration of advisement/employment touchpoints into weekly grad seminar
- Rolling onboarding with preventive actions

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RESULTS

- **No surprises!** Student arrival/reporting dates are now reflected in staff workload and scheduling

- Workflow enhancements, decreased/increased repetition and follow-up as warranted

- Increased sense of belonging and community. Students feel supported, know the proper contacts, and are comfortable approaching to request help

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NEXT STEPS

- Process refinement/streamlining – removing workflow redundancies
- Quantitative analysis of results
- Integrate with staff process documentation
- Examining *Offboarding* processes for students finishing their programs

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REFLECTIONS

- Attention and memory are limited resources
- Modest adjustments can have big effects
- Change is possible and welcomed

TAKEAWAY: STUDENT ONBOARDING - IT'S A THING

Travis Weatherford

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weatherford@sc.edu

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